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Zechner, Minna

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# Relational Narratives and Moorings in International Mobility and Migration at an Advanced Age

*Minna Zechner*  
*University of Lapland*

## **Abstract**

This article focuses on personal stories of international mobility and migration as told close to the age of retirement. Talking about past international mobility and migration, people tend to tell stories that are relational; choices and actions are often explained in relation to other people (Mason 2004). I map the relational nature of the mobility life stories in the beginning and at the end of the stories and focus on moorings described close to the time of retirement. Moorings reflect the value that individuals place on locations, and which might influence their migration decisions (Barcus and Brunn 2010). Moorings anchor a person to a specific place through a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as relatives, property, dwelling, employment, and networks of connections. At the time of retirement, moorings influence decisions concerning not only a place of retirement but also the kin-work and care that is necessary in maintaining the emotional and material well-being of families (see Conway 2007; Moon 1995). My analysis shows that mobility life stories told at an advanced age tend to be less relational at their beginning than at the point when the mobility life story is told. In a similar manner, moorings, which include other people and things such as housing or health-care availability, may change depending on the stage of life. Children, grandchildren, and sometimes parents are given great importance at an advanced age, whereas studies, career, and adventures are emphasized during youth.

**Keywords:** moorings, transnational, care, mobility life story, aging

## **Introduction**

Looking back on international mobility and migration, people tend to tell stories that are relational, that is, their choices and actions are often explained in relation to important people in their lives. In this article, I analyze personal stories of international mobility and migration as mobility

life stories told from the vantage point of advanced age. Additionally, I focus on the moorings that the interviewees describe. Moorings anchor a person to a specific place through a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as family members, housing, employment, and feelings of belonging (Moon 1995). At the time of retirement, moorings influence decisions concerning not only the place of retirement, but also the kin-work necessary to sustain families emotionally and materially over time and places (see Conway 2007; Moon 1995). International mobility in this article means short-term trips such as holidays and business trips, while international migration refers to longer-term residence abroad (see also Habti and Koikkalainen 2014, 7). The analysis focuses on migration since interviewers talked more about it; however, short-term mobilities were also discussed, and they were recounted as meaningful.

This article follows the mobility paradigm in social sciences with a transnational approach, hence not only dealing with the causes and consequences of migration, but also focusing on settled migrants. The transnational approach also considers short-term mobility, circulation, and the influences mobility has on people's lives—including those who stay put (see Faist 2013). A common assumption in the scholarly literature is that people who cross borders are young and able-bodied (Dossa and Coe 2017). When advanced age has been included in transnational studies, the focus has mainly been on transnational migrants involved in elder care, on retirement migrants,<sup>1</sup> or on aging labor migrants (Walsh and Näre 2016, 3). It is important to study the everyday lives and experiences of aging transnational individuals and their families whose relationalities and interdependencies, which are embedded in complex historical processes, are changing. Focus on relationships and moorings offers a dynamic starting point for analyzing narratives of migration (Casey and Maye-Banbury 2017). Research focusing on relational aspects is beneficial for examining migrants' experiences in the light of agency and structure (Gold 2005). I explore ways in which the lives of migrants are relationally constructed, paying special attention to a mobility life story in which the narrator does not have very close family members, in order to determine specifically whether this life story could also be relational. I also illustrate how migration is linked to various mooring points that have arisen over time.

### **Relational Stories with Multiple Moorings**

In the Western world, individual uniqueness and independence are appreciated, but psychological or emotional interdependence is also valued (Kağıtçıbaşı 2007). Migration is inherently relational because people live their lives in connection with others and embedded in various networks (Gold 2005). In international mobility stories, which are told in the context of life experiences, events and circumstances, issues of context, contingency, and opportunity seem to be significant for the narrators (Mason

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1 The term *retirement migrants* refers to people who migrate mainly after they retire; *retired migrants*, on the other hand, are migrants who have retired and then may migrate or not.

2004, 166). International mobility and immobility are explicated as a result of complex considerations, reasons, coincidences, and continuities. Having only one reason for settling somewhere can be seen as a miscalculation or a wrong decision, suggesting that it is a moral virtue to have a multilayered and relational existence (Mason 2004, 166).

A relational existence in mobility life stories means that people often explain their choices of mobility and immobility in relation to family members, kin, and friends. In turn, these contacts can be seen as part of the moorings that are present in the person's life, and that form the elements that motivate them to want to remain in or return to an area (Golledge and Stimson 1997; Longino 1992). Moorings are often based on one's own experiences of living in a specific place. However, my informants also had moorings based on the experiences of significant others living in particular places. In international mobility and migration, moorings can also be transmitted or imaginary, based on stories told by transnational communities or family members, or as products of marketing activities (e.g., tourist destinations) (Portes and Rumbaut 1990; O'Reilly and Benson 2009).

The concept of moorings captures the intrinsic value that individuals place on locations, and which might influence their migration decisions (Barcus and Brunn 2010). Dennis Conway (2007, 423) developed four main groups of moorings based on the work of Moon (1995, 515): life course, cultural, spatial, and temporal. Life course moorings have to do with specific times of life such as education periods that are usually completed during the years of youth, or grandparenting which often takes place during later years. Cultural moorings include social class, shared ideas, values, and beliefs in one's community or reference group, and attachments to places. Spatial moorings relate to the possibilities and barriers that individuals experience in certain settings, for example, social networks and employment possibilities. Finally, temporal moorings are related with lengths of stay in different countries and the ties that strengthen and weaken as a consequence of these stays. Technologies that allow affordable interaction across long distances tend to cushion the effects of temporal moorings. However, moorings represent place-specific arrangements, and have meanings attached to them, which people use to help organize their lives.

People whose lives are characterized by international mobility have multiple moorings, and this is reflected by their having several places of residence or several places to which they feel they belong (Cohen, Duncan, and Thulemark 2013, 4). The concept of place is based on the location of action and social contacts (Pred 1984, 283). A place is especially an entity containing particular activities, physical circumstances, people, and atmosphere (Relph 1976). People attach emotional qualities (such as feelings of belonging) to places. These emotional qualities are developed across time when individuals or their family members live in a specific place. Moorings represent ties that bind, and these include care responsibilities. The participants in this study had moorings in several locations, and around the

time of retirement, they weighed these moorings in various ways and often attempted to maintain multiple moorings. This emphasis on multiple moorings is to great extent driven by kinscripts that are understandings of the proper roles of older adults and grandparents (Stack and Burton 1993).

Moorings, interdependencies, and relational dimensions can be narrated in different ways. Mason (2004) has identified four main narrative styles for telling relational life stories that reflect a narrator's experiences of kinship, friendship, and sense of self. A common narrative style is that of relational inclusion and co-presence, and it is highly inclusive of family and kin (167). In these accounts, the co-presence, inclusion, and the perceived needs of kin are taken for granted.

Narratives of relational participation represent a narrative style in which members of kin have a participatory role, and decisions are told as a result of discussions and explicit negotiations with key actors (Mason 2004, 169). Shared decision-making and a consideration of a wide variety of moorings are presented as positive ways of making choices, although sometimes one partner may have a more pressing desire to move, for instance in order to advance a career or learn new skills. However, when present, the views of the children are not necessarily sought (*ibid.*). If the negotiating positions are not equal, the end result is not necessarily a mutual agreement, but rather some type of balancing of moorings.

Narratives of relational constraint and conflict are stories of relationships that are restrictive in some way. The choices made by the significant others seem to limit the possibilities that the narrator has in terms of mobility, and consensual family interests, common acceptance, and participatory rights are not very visible in these narratives (Mason 2004, 174).

Finally, in narratives of relational individualism, people explain how they exercise individual agency regarding mobility while also taking the interests of significant others into account. Accounts following a narrative style of relational individualism convey a recognition that individualistic decision-making is not necessarily culturally acceptable, and therefore justificatory claims can be made, for example, by claiming to be selfish for the right reasons (Mason 2004, 175).

### **Analyzing Mobility Life Stories**

The data for this study consist of eleven interviews conducted with twelve people (six women and six men, all white) aged fifty-seven to eighty-seven. Most were in their fifties and sixties. Five of the interviewees were retired, six still worked full time, and one was neither working nor formally retired. Two of the retired interviewees worked occasionally. All but one interviewee had adult children, and many of them had grandchildren. The interviews were conducted between November 2014 and January 2015 in Finland, with one interview conducted as a video call between Finland and the United States.

The interviewees were recruited using the snowball method through friends and acquaintances of interviewees and me. Snowball sampling is

designed to identify people with particular knowledge or members of a community (Atkinson and Flint 2001). The interviewees were so-called privileged migrants (see Fechter and Walsh 2010, 1199) who are European or North American professionals moving abroad (to Australia, Finland, Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom), mostly for professional reasons. They were middle-class transnationals: nine had a university-level education, three had occupational training, and they found their income levels satisfactory. All of the interviewees had lived abroad at some stage of their lives, ranging from two to fifty-four years. Most of those who had lived abroad for fewer than six years at a time were Finnish-born with Finnish spouses, and they were sent abroad by their company (interviews 2, 3, 4, and 9). This made their migration initially temporary.

Seven interviewees had lived abroad for periods longer than six years at a time and had migrated to or from Finland (interviewees 1 and 10 had returned to their countries of origin rather recently). The reasons for moving abroad included education, employment, and a desire to live abroad or to maintain close proximity to a family member. Four of those who had lived abroad longer than six years met their partners while living abroad (interviews 1, 6, 7, and 8), and two (interviews 10 and 11) met their partners in their birth countries, prior to migration. All of the interviewees were accustomed to traveling for business and pleasure, with and without family members. Their adult children—according to the interviewees—also had complicated histories of international travel, migration, and mobility. I deliberately included participants with a variety of backgrounds in order to study whether shorter and longer periods of residence abroad shaped the relational nature of mobility life stories and had an impact on the moorings that were created.

The open-ended interviews lasted between fifty and eighty minutes, and during that time some basic background information on the participants and their family members, such as their ages, occupations, nationalities, economic situation, education, and present place of residence, was collected. Most of the time was spent on constructing a mobility life story, which meant that when the interviewees told their life stories (and partly those of their children), they constructed them in the context of their international mobilities. This was done with evident ease, and they were able to link the reasons and events of their mobility and immobility into a coherent narrative. The telling of a life story is an act of interweaving the events of their lives with themes of personal causation, value, and interest, using the present as a lens and relying on memories (Jonson, Kielhofner, and Borell 1997, 50). Interviewees anticipated what I, as an audience, wanted to hear, and this influenced their telling (see Wortham 2011). Autobiographical memory is unstable, and the factual errors increase with the temporal distance to the event to be remembered (McAdams 2008, 246).

Faltering memory, however, did not impair the analysis that was done by narrative methods. These methods seek to interpret the ways in

which people perceive reality, make sense of their worlds, and perform social actions (Riessmann 1993). A life course approach was followed, thus requiring a holistic view of the life stories. Interpretive processes occur throughout one's life and form the context for lived experiences in advanced age (Grenier 2012, 21). Narratives provide an excellent medium for investigating the similarities and differences of human aging over the life course. Narratives also allow the study of how the family patterns and traditions are reflected in the lives of the storytellers, and how the narrators adapt to and expand the possibilities and limits set by the historical time they live in (Ruth and Kenyon 1996). In narrative analysis, it is important to consider both what is said and how it is said, and this initiates reflection on the performative dimensions of the stories (Phoenix, Smith, and Sparkes 2010). In this study, the questions being asked were how the relational migrant was being constructed in the telling and which relational narrative styles were used in telling the story. Instead of analyzing the entire story, I focus on relationality, which was very much present at the beginning and at the end of the stories, and how the participants' lives were shaped by the experiences of significant others, such as parents and grandparents. The analysis emphasizes the performative dimensions of the stories, but also pays attention to the story content, by asking what kind of moorings have been accumulated and possibly lost across time. The analysis highlights the processes of responding to the world and connecting with it (see Tamboukou 2010), through significant others and moorings.

### **Beginnings of Mobility Life Stories: Conflicts and Individualism**

A sixty-year-old Finnish woman who lived in Germany for nineteen years before returning to Finland for her children's schooling told a mobility life story that starts with relational constraint and conflict. When I asked for her initial reason for going abroad, she responded: "I figured it out over there, after a long time, the reason why I left. I wanted to get rid of my mother's grip that was too tight" (Interview 6).<sup>2</sup> The interviewee has been reflecting on her reasons for moving abroad, and a relational conflict that is presented as a reason for migration is induced by a particular mooring, her own mother. Interestingly, it was her mother who found for the interviewee a first summer job abroad (in Sweden), before she moved to Germany. The mother's motivation was given to be that she herself never had had the chance to work abroad for more than short periods of time.

Relational individualism is present at the beginnings of half of the mobility life stories. A sixty-eight-year-old American man who lived in Finland for forty-two years describes the beginning of his mobility life as follows:

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<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted in Finnish and English by the author and audio-recorded. Recordings were transcribed by Pia Auvinen and Susanna Peuronen. The Finnish interview citations in the text have been translated by the author and modified by cutting out repetition, mumbling, and other features of spoken language. They are still true representations of the original dialogue. Some details in the excerpts have been changed as a means of anonymization. My sincere thanks to all the participants in the study.



I was studying at an American university, and, in 1966, I was awarded this scholarship to go to Egypt. Then, the next year I decided to apply to the University of Stockholm and went there to do a yearlong degree program. Then, I went back to Egypt to work in an archaeology expedition. I then went back to the United States to start a graduate program. After a year, I was looking around for some place to go. I was bored with my studies so I ended up coming to Finland in 1970. (Interview 8)

The story is filled with individual ambitions of travel, seeing new places, and gathering new experiences.

Youth tends to be the time to create many life-course moorings that relate to important life events, such as the end of obligatory schooling, the beginning of further education, first employment, and relationships (see Mortimer and Larson 2002). In this individual's story, the relational manner of decision concerned his mother's fear of his being too close to the Soviet Union when he was in Sweden. At the time, the narrator's older brother (by thirteen years) tried to convince their mother that it was probably safer in Sweden than in the United States in the event that anything should happen between the United States and the Soviet Union.

In these two beginnings of mobility life stories, the impact of moorings that affect how people feel anchored in a specific location is rather vague. The narrators are young, and things at home, such as parents, siblings, and study places, seem to push the narrators into international mobility and migration, rather than to keep them in place. Future alluring moorings in other destinations include employment, new skills (such as languages), study programs, and the experiences of living somewhere else. These spatial moorings are imagined expectations that are not based on personal experiences of living in a specific place. Moorings are often seen as considerations between the place of departure, the home, the place of destination, and the (future) home away (Conway 2007, 422).

### **Relational Participation in the Mobility Life Stories**

Relational participation reflects how negotiations and joint planning are presented as ways to make mobility-related decisions. Relative participation is a prevalent style of narration throughout two of the mobility life stories. Both are told by Finnish men, aged sixty-seven and sixty-one, married to Finnish women, and working for a large international company. Both worked as expatriates in Germany, and one also worked in the United States. One studied in Germany and stayed there to work, but when a Finnish company offered him a job in Finland, "my wife and I decided that we would come to Finland" (Interview 2).

Their move to Finland is presented as a joint decision. They had one child at the time, and, in the coming years, they lived twice for two years in Germany with two children. I asked him how the boys liked the moves:



They liked it a lot; we had a really good time all those years over there. The boys were rather small then, so they could not really compare the differences between here and there. Of course, when we came back, our clothing was different, nobody had Adidas button sweatpants. Bicycles were different and other stuff. The harsh everyday reality of Finland hit them; it took a bit of time to get used to life over here. (Interview 2)

The decisions are presented as being jointly made, and the we-talk (see Mason 2004) indicates the likeness of the emigration experience for the entire family. The daily life of the children, run by the wife, is assumed to have gone smoothly in Germany, although the need for adjustments after their return to Finland is recognized. It is portrayed that the children did not yet have cultural moorings (style of clothing) in Finland that would have made the return easy for them. The positive sides of international mobility for the interviewee's young children and his wife are somewhat taken for granted despite the fact that mobility stemmed mainly from the career advancement of the narrator. The power imbalance probably benefitted him as the main provider, and not asking the views of the children is justified by their young age.

A relational participation style of narration continues throughout the mobility life stories of these men, and can be further seen in this extract:

If you asked my wife, she would say that if we were to move to some European country, it would probably be Germany. Maybe when we are retired, we will reside elsewhere for the winter, and in Finland for the summer. (Interview 3)

Again, there is much talk about "us": him and his wife. They have three children and five grandchildren, and both the narrator's and his wife's mothers are alive and in good health. The relational aspects of the mobility narrative in the context of retirement tend to focus on him and his wife, and the other members of kin are not brought to the fore (see also Mason 2004, 169). The care needs of grandchildren and parents are discussed elsewhere in the life story, but kin-work is not presented as a strong mooring influencing his mobility and immobility. Instead, climate, language, and ways of living in European countries or the United States are represented as potential cultural and spatial moorings, pulling them toward certain locations outside Finland when they retire.

Two other Finnish men, aged fifty-seven and fifty-eight, who worked abroad as expatriates, showed a narrative style of relational individualism at the beginning of their stories, but as their life stories approached retirement, the prevailing style was one of relational participation. The beginning of one of the mobilities started as a career move:

I hinted to my boss during feedback discussions that I was interested in possibilities to work abroad. Half a year later, he told me that there were plans to start up an office in England and asked if I remembered the earlier discussion. That is how it started. (Interview 9)

When asking about the schooling of their three children in England, the first response was, “You should ask my wife about that—she was dealing with that stuff, but it all went well.” His focus seems to be on his career, and the routine of everyday life rests on the shoulders of his wife. However, the narrator is very much aware of this fact:

When I think of the culture shock, it must have been a bigger challenge for my wife than for me since she did not have a work routine. I went to the office every morning and came back late in the evening, but she did not have that. (Interview 9)

The time spent abroad is mainly recounted as his project. In Mason’s (2004) study, those using a narrative style of relational individualism tend to balance their selfishness with the benefits that they provide for the close ones. In the case above, those benefits include the language skills, cultural competence, and the courage to travel and live abroad, all of which were explained to be beneficial for the children in later life.

Approaching retirement, the narrative style of the story becomes the one of relational participation. This is especially visible when plans and aspirations regarding mobility and immobility in retirement are considered. Moorings are also being assessed—for example, a summer house in Finland against life abroad:

We do not own a summer house; it is one thing that has been to some extent planned. Of course, my wife and I like to travel, and we have not ruled out the possibility of living abroad for a longer period of time when we are retired. (Interview 4)

Having a pension as a source of income, as opposed to income linked to employment, tends to loosen certain moorings. Employment as well as income benefits such as a housing benefit or income maintenance are usually tied to a specific place (Zechner 2010). The source of income may be a decisive factor in international mobility and migration. Also, the arrival of grandchildren may create new moorings:

My dream could be, for example, a summer residence abroad. At the same time, I understand the rootlessness that might then occur. It is nice to go and live by the palm trees, but what would you do there? Where are your friends and relatives and hobbies?

Children are here, and that has to be taken into account. Our place is here in Finland. (Interview 9)

A summer residence is not a mooring in its own right; instead, it needs social ties, meanings, and activities to become a mooring. The interviewee's first grandchild was due to be born in a few months, and he said that his wife had been limiting his enthusiasm over any travels. This might have been because of care responsibilities toward her mother, although these had lately diminished since the mother had moved into serviced housing. However, even when receiving services, the need for care, emotional support, and company do not entirely fade away (see Graneheim, Johansson, and Lindgren 2014). Aging parents and parents-in-law, especially those who need care, tend to be fixed moorings, whereas children often change their location when they grow up. This may make decisions on a place of residence rather difficult for retiring parents.

### **A Relational Mobility Life Story as a Single Person?**

One of the informants was an American woman aged sixty-three with a history of living for thirty-five years in Finland. She was single, and her story does not include any references to her having had a partner at any stage. The beginning of her mobility life story contains a number of ambitions concerning languages, study, work, and life abroad. The predominant narrative style is one of relational individuality: "The first reason why I wanted to live abroad was just to be abroad" (Interview 5).

When talking about the mobility and immobility of the present, the relational aspects of the story are somewhat hard to find:

Interviewer: Who do you consider as your close ones at the moment?

Well, that is difficult. I mean my family is in the US, and my one brother has two young children. When they lived in the US, I visited them twice a year because the kids were very little. Now they have been away, and I have not talked with them so much. My other brother has a step-son, and usually when I go there I stay with that family. I see my friends from college and high school. (Interview 5)

Various scattered moorings are present in the narrative, relatives and friends, but it is difficult for her to evaluate how strong they are. She attempts to tell a relational story reflecting the moorings that she considers when planning her retirement:

I have never thought I am here for the rest of my life. I have this feeling that I would like to be in the States where my family is. That they could somehow help me, more than my being a burden

on some friends or something. I think it will be other factors beyond my control that will decide that. I am drawn to the idea of going back there, but if I cannot afford to live there, it means mostly health care. (Interview 5)

Anticipating future care needs, she balances between two different moorings: family and friends. She would prefer being cared for (if needed) by her family, but the excerpt shows her difficulty in defining those family members she could rely on. Without living parents, a spouse, or children, who often are thought of as being the closest family members, building a relational life story requires effort. Family members, the brothers and their families, have been living far away for decades, and yearly extended visits (temporal moorings) do not necessarily create or sustain bonds that are strong enough to count on when different moorings and sources of help and care are weighed at the time of retirement.

Not only social contacts wither, as a result of international migration and mobility, but also the eligibility for some benefits.

I appreciate that I get much better coverage and care here than I would in the States when I retire or get older or whatever. Until recently I could not move back to the States because I have no health insurance there. I have diabetes, high blood pressure, all these things. Before Obamacare, if I moved back, they would simply say: “we do not cover you for that.” (Interview 5)

She presents health care as such a strong spatial mooring that it takes the power of choice over her retirement location from her hands. In Finland, health care is based on publicly arranged national insurance that covers all permanent and legal residents and is primarily funded through taxation (THL 2014); therefore she would not have private health insurance to take along from Finland. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act 2010 (known popularly as Obamacare, see U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) is a policy reform that ensures that all legal American residents have health insurance. It has enabled this specific mooring of health care in the United States while making it possible for the interviewee to move to the U.S. when she retires. This is an essential mooring for her, especially given that with a history of various illnesses and advanced age, her need for health and possibly social care is likely to increase.

### **Relational Inclusion and Co-Presence in Mobility Life Stories**

Two (or rather three, because one interview included a couple) of my informants told mobility life stories with a constant narrative style of relational inclusion and co-presence. Basically, all aspects of mobility and immobility are encountered in relation to the needs of significant others,

from the beginning to the end. The story of an elderly American couple (aged eighty-seven and eighty-four) starts like this:

Our son came here about forty years ago, I guess as an exchange student, and he ended up marrying a Finnish woman. So he lives here and teaches at the university, and they have a child who is over at another university, and that is why we came to Finland in the first place. Because of our son, his family is here, and we visited several times before we decided to move. (Interview 11)

Here, family is portrayed as the main mooring that led to the move from the United States to Finland. Interestingly, the couple also has a daughter who lives in the U.S., and she has three children, some of whom also have children (three great-grandchildren altogether). When asked why they did not move closer to the daughter, they said:

Actually, they encouraged us to come and live here [Finland] for a year and see how we liked it. We already knew about that time that we did like it here, and our daughter would have her own life [in the U.S.]. She probably would have liked us to move closer to her, but we finally decided to look upon it as an adventure. We've never really been abroad. (Interview 11)

The couple ended up balancing the two spatial moorings against each other. The son and his wife in Finland encouraged them to move, and the daughter is described as having been rather preoccupied with her life at the time. Later on, they explain how the daughter realized that they were not going to come back after they bought an apartment. In owning a property, a certain kind of fixity (see Hannam, Sheller, and Urry 2006) is established, and the daughter seems to have understood property ownership to be such a strong mooring as to keep the parents in Finland.

Another story laden with relational inclusion and co-presence was told by an American woman, aged sixty-three. She had lived in Finland for twenty-six years, after which she returned to the United States, a few months before the interview. Her mobility life story starts with a description of how her husband was looking for two jobs in Finland, for himself and for his wife (the narrator). Their two young sons were considered in a specific way when living in Finland:

Our boys finished school [in Finland] but went back to the U.S. for university. It was really important to us that they had that choice. I mean, that we took them out of their culture and nationality, and we kind of played gods with their lives and brought them overseas. But in the end there was really no question in both of their minds, or in our minds. I mean they have had incredible

opportunities in the U.S., and I just do not see that that would have happened in Finland. (Interview 10)

The assumed needs of the two sons, regarding the choice of study place, were taken into account when leaving the United States, and also during the time when the family lived in Finland. When the time came to make a decision on where the sons should study, the narrator was unsure whether the sons, the parents, or all of them had actually made the choices. She presents two cultural moorings that they detached their sons from: nationality and culture.

The ending of this mobility life story is also a prime example of relational co-presence and inclusion:

I always knew I wanted to move back, and it was a matter of when. My husband died. Of course, I had good friends in Finland, but I do not really have close family connections. I just wanted to be closer to my grandchildren and part of their lives. Once Obamacare was passed, I was able to get health insurance; that might have been a showstopper. I have no identity in the U.S. I have not had a credit rating here and having a Visa-card in Finland does not count. (Interview 10)

In her story, family is portrayed as being a more important mooring than good friends. The death of her husband, the child care needs of her children, and her aging father (not mentioned in excerpt) caused a decisive change in the balance of her moorings from Finland toward the United States. The possibility to get a health insurance was again another essential mooring that made her migrate. As she had suffered from cancer, she anticipated needing medical follow-ups and possibly future treatments. Her story shows that national policies on welfare and employment, in addition to the laws and policies that govern immigration, are essential spatial moorings for mobile individuals (see Zechner 2010).

There are two mobility life stories (one of a British woman and another of a Finnish woman) that start with a narrative style of relational individualism and end with one of relational inclusion and co-presence. Both women (now aged seventy-six and sixty-eight) were single at the time they moved abroad for the first time. Their reasons for leaving were somewhat similar. The British woman went to Switzerland at the age of seventeen, in the mid-1950s:

I was interested in other people's points of view of life, not just the English one. I was born just before the war and all this patriotism and hate. I didn't quite like it. (Interview 7)

The Finnish woman went to the United Kingdom for a year to "sail bigger seas" (Interview 1). Both women portray their migration as being

necessary to broaden their scope of thinking and to learn new ideas, languages, and ways of living (cultural moorings). Both were single at the time of first departure, and they met their husbands in countries where they lived for decades: Finland and Germany, respectively.

The individualistic style of narration disappeared from the story of the Finnish interviewee when she talked about her latest move back to Finland from Germany:

I never had any intentions to move back to Finland, but when the grandson was born, it gave this kind of a push that I should be closer. One just loves the small one so much that one has to be closer. (Interview 1)

The birth of a grandson directly created such a strong mooring that it outweighed the alternative of staying with her husband, who stayed in Germany with no intention to move to Finland.

The British interviewee decided to stay in Finland after her husband had died. Her two sons live in Finland, and she has four grandchildren. This is how she relates her decision to stay:

I did consider going back to England because I still have some family there. My cousins are very close, one of my cousins was widowed about the same time, and we traveled together. But then I thought it is likely I would go through the same process, you know this shock, cultural shock almost. (Interview 7)

The death of her Finnish husband broke one central mooring that ultimately kept her in Finland. At first, her children in Finland and cousins in England are considered differently as moorings, although the importance of being close to grandchildren is later recognized in her story. It was a cultural mooring that finally made her choose to stay in Finland: the wish to avoid the strain of resettling after having lived for fifty-two years in Finland. As a young woman, the desire to see different ways of life offered a reason to leave her home country, but in advanced age, keeping the same way of life offers a reason to stay. Thus, the same (or similar) moorings may be given different weight, value, or importance at different stages of life.

### **Changes and Continuities in Mobility Life Stories and Moorings**

In my data, narratives of relational constraint and conflict are present only at the beginning of some of the mobility life stories whereas narratives of relational individualism are rather common at the beginning of the mobility life stories. The narrative style of relational participation seems to be maintained throughout some of the mobility life stories, while narratives of relational inclusion and co-presence are mostly present toward the end of the mobility life stories. Relational aspects thus tend to become more



apparent in mobility life stories the closer the telling comes to the present time of retirement.

One explanation for why relationality in mobility life stories is common at the time of retirement may be that people's motivations, life goals, and social positionings change (see Conway and Pleydell-Pearce 2000). In addition, memories and the interpretations of the importance of moorings and meaningful life events change over time while people accumulate new experiences, some of them so important that they change the narrated life story (McAdams 2008). In mobility life stories, past actions and choices were narrated as they are understood by older adults, and thus the reasonings given in the mobility life stories may differ from those that would be presented if the stories had been told decades earlier. Fitzgerald (1996) notes that when telling their life stories, older adults tend to report a large portion of memories drawn from an age range of fifteen to twenty-five. He assumes that this large proportion of youthful memories reflects the wide availability of identity-related memories, which occur within this age range. Therefore, including mobility stories that start from an early age is essential in understanding the mobility and immobility choices and considerations around the time of retirement.

Around the time of retirement, the interviewees are all seen to have several globally dispersed moorings and places of attachment that create a map of their possible places for retirement, and, as such, they need to choose where they will stay. Evaluating each mooring leads to its acceptance, rejection, or demotion as an attachment to peopled places (Conway 2007, 421). Many of the interviewees attempt to moor themselves in multiple locales, as well as to places where they have never resided, through the presence of kin. Multiple moorings kept them traveling internationally, even on short-term visits to provide care for, or simply to maintain relationships with, kin (see Baldassar, Wilding, and Baldock 2006, 146–47). The wish to continue international mobility is a kind of cultural mooring, a way of life (Zechner 2017). Visits also serve the purpose of sending the members of kin a message. This message says that wherever the close ones settle, the rest of the kin are able and willing to place their own moorings in that same location too. The emphasis on multiple moorings at an advanced age is to a great extent driven by kinscripts that are understandings of the proper roles of older adults and grandparents (Stack and Burton 1993).

As seen in this study, people try to match the timing of their life course transitions with those of significant others (see Moon 1995). Family commitments may either prompt a migration or make older mobile individuals more likely to stay in a place where their children and grandchildren live. When parents' mobility decisions hinge on their children's location, children's impermanence in the marriage setting, together with issues of employment and lifestyle, may leave parents unsettled about their own planning. The only interviewee without children or a partner seemed to

have fewer or weaker moorings, which made it difficult for the interviewee to decide whether to go or stay.

As a person reaches an advanced age, international mobility and immobility become conscious decisions, and it is unlikely that relocation will be possible later on. Not only the care needs of the older and the youngest members of kin, but also one's own present and future care needs form a part of these considerations (see also Bolzman 2013, 71). The influential determinants in these decisions have been seen to be family obligations, generational ties, divorce from or death of a spouse, and children's social adulthood (Conway, Potter, and St Bernard 2013, 90–92). Parallel to these run structural barriers and possibilities such as day care, citizenship, and health care, and these influence not only family commitments but also the possibilities to be mobile and to migrate. Belonging to a rather privileged group of people with high levels of education and various resources offered the interviewees a number of choices that are not commonly available to many migrants. Although immigration policies are often considered to be the most significant factors in constraining and enabling mobility, it has become evident that issues such as pension plans, daycare availability and expense, and healthcare policies also have similar effects.

Aging changes the lives of individuals through retirement, ailments, frailty, widowhood, and the presence of more free time, as well as the loss of friends and relatives. Ill health may make individuals compromise their quality or choice of life with their potential for international mobility. People's ailments, as well as the difficulties of getting insured and transferring health benefits across countries, may result in unwanted mobility or immobility. Thus, as individuals grow older and their financial, emotional, and bodily resources change and often diminish, their chances of maintaining mobility decrease. This probably is one of the reasons why mobility life stories seem to include increasing amounts of relational aspects, and more emphasis is put on certain spatial moorings, such as health and social care services.

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